



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

Athenry

Multi-Purpose Community and Enterprise Facility

Planning Design Statement

to accompany Part 8 Application

**Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Part 8 of the Planning
& Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)**

Pursuant to the requirements of the above, **Galway County Council** propose to carry out the following works:

- Development at Existing Building on Junction of Northgate Street & Burkes Lane, Athenry, Co. Galway
- Involving Change of use, renovation and refurbishment of former Restaurant / Take Away / Offices and Place of Worship as granted under previously planning ref. no's 06/3553 and 07/5217 to a multi-purpose community and enterprise facility with public reception area, multi-use offices, meeting rooms and supporting spaces.
- The proposed development includes connection to existing services, associated site works and new signage.

The subject works are located within the Athenry Architectural Conservation Area.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Galway County Council is seeking Part 8 planning approval to carry out works at an existing two storey vacant building at the junction of Northgate Street & Burkes Lane, Athenry, Co. Galway. The vacant property, in the ownership of Galway County Council, is referred to locally as Somers House.

The property was purchased by Galway County Council in 2022, as a result of a funding award by the Department of Community and Rural Development under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) Building Acquisition Measure. The TVRS places particular emphasis on supporting bringing vacant and derelict buildings and sites back into use as multi-purpose spaces.

The Part 8 application involves seeking a change of use for this property which has operated previously as a Restaurant / Take Away / Offices and Place of Worship as granted previously {Planning ref. no's 06/3553 and 07/5217} and its renovation and refurbishment into a multi-purpose community and enterprise facility with public reception area, multi-use offices, meeting rooms and supporting spaces.

The property is located in the Athenry Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) and the development will consist of renovation and refurbishment of the existing building and shall specifically consist of:

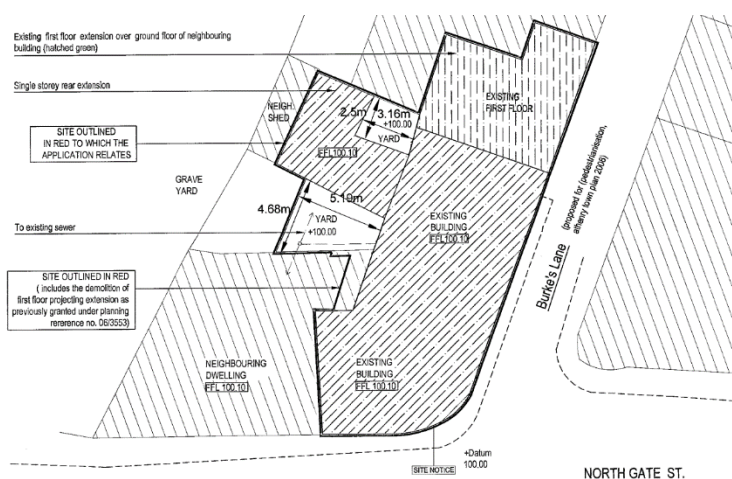
- internal demolition of the existing Ground and First Floor partitions;
- The excavation and installation of a new lift and pit;
- Replacement of existing External Windows and Doors;
- Renovation of rear single storey area;
- Relocation of existing toilets and welfare;
- New system of foul drainage installed utilising to existing connection to public sewer;
- Installation of a kitchenette at first floor level adjacent to the meeting room;
- Full Mechanical & Electrical Fitout.

The internal layout and renovation proposed for this Galway County Council property is aligned to goals of the ACA which is to enable places of architectural value to be protected and to the goals of regeneration which including addressing vacancy in the Town Centre and delivering spaces capable of facilitating services and activities for community and economic sustainability.

This Statement explains the nature of the proposed development and aims to demonstrate compliance with the provisions of the Galway County Council Development Plan 2022-2028 (CDP), Athenry Local Area Plan 2012-2022 (LAP) and the Ministerial Guidelines entitled Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities (AHPG's 2004, reissued 2011.) and how the proposed renovation and refurbishment is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. This report should be read in conjunction with the planning application documentation, sub-consultants reports and the Architectural drawings.

2. EXISTING SITE

The subject site is located on the corner of North Gate Street and Burkes Lane in the centre of Athenry. With its curved exterior at the junction it occupies a prominent position. The existing building is a two-storey property which is owned by Galway County Council and has been vacant for an extended period since its last usage as a ground floor restaurant with office and Congregation space at first floor.



The current site consists of a two-storey block built structure with a slate roof facing onto North Gate Street and Burkes Lane with a single storey extension constructed to the to the Northeast and adjoining the main structure and creating two small yards.

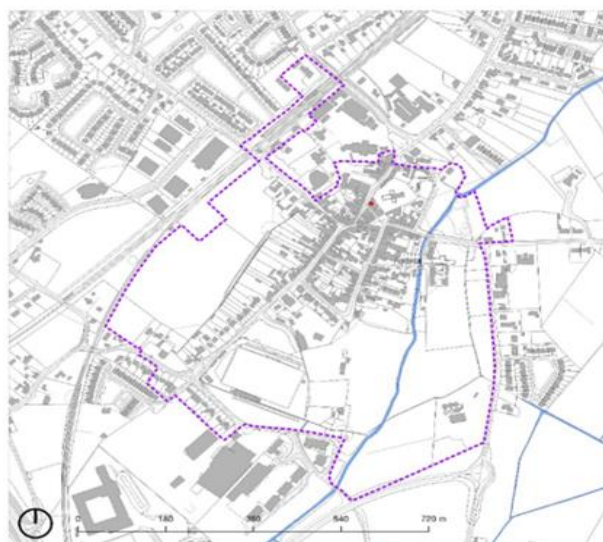
At first floor, along the Burkes Lane elevation, the property extends over the ground floor of the adjoining property.

The current property boundary line and site arrangement was defined in planning permission reference number 063553

which incorporated the adjacent first floor area on Burkes Lane into the development and rationalised the extant extensions in the rear yard. The building was thus used as a ground floor restaurant with first floor offices for a period until a further change of use was approved for the employment of part of the first-floor area on Burkes Lane to be used as a place of worship.

The site, therefore, currently possess approval for first floor offices and place of congregation along with a ground floor restaurant, although it has been vacant for a significant time.

The site is located within the Athenry Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) as indicated on figure 2. Galway County Council development plan describes and ACA as *'a place, area, group of structures or townscape, taking account of building lines and heights, that is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or that contributes to the appreciation of a protected structure, and whose character it is an objective of a development plan to preserve'*.



The Galway County Development Plan (2022-2028) describe an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) is a place, area, group of structures or townscape, which is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or contributes to the appreciation of a protected structure. An Architectural Conservation Area may or may not include protected structures. In an ACA, protection is placed on the external appearance of such areas or structures.

The development plan further defines the **Statement of Significance for Athenry as:** Athenry's principal significance lies in its degree of survival as a medieval fortified town, embracing a number of fine monuments and archaeological remains. The street pattern, plot sizes, buildings and architectural coherence visibly emerge directly from this historic role. The majority of town buildings spans the late 19th century and share many characteristics. Surviving traditional shop fronts are important features. The open fields within the walls are notable. The form, attractiveness and uniqueness of the town are of international significance and a potentially greater cultural attraction.

Given the location of the property within the Medieval Town Centre and ACA and its location close to a National Monument (St. Mary's) an Archaeological Impact Assessment has been prepared by a specialist consultant (Through Time Ltd) to assess the affects (if any) on the site and accompanies the Part 8 Planning Pack for review.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

The online planning register highlights one number previous planning application on the subject site.

Planning reference Number 022841:

For the retention of (1) use of premises as a take-away. (2) alterations to premises to include alterations to window at Burkes Lane to include all ancillary works.

We note that planning permission was refused by the Planning Authority for the proposed development in 2002.

Planning reference Number 063553: For proposed alterations to existing 2-storey premises at junction of Northgate Street and Burke's Lane Athenry. The proposed development includes the following: (1) Change of use of (a) existing 2-storey residential unit to restaurant with ancillary take away use at ground floor (as extension of existing adjacent restaurant) and to office use at first floor and (b) existing first floor restaurant area to office use to form part of office use referred to at (a) above); (2) Demolition of existing ground floor store and first floor bathroom extension and construction of new ground floor extension for restaurant related use; (3) Elevational changes to front and rear elevations including new shopfront and changes to windows and doors; and (4) all associated works and services. (Gross floor area of new building 38 sq m and of building to be retained 273 sq m).

It is noted that planning permission was granted by the Planning Authority for the proposed development with conditions in 2006.

Planning reference Number 075217: for change of use from existing offices as previously granted under PI. Ref. No. 06/3553, to place of worship use on part of the first-floor level. (Gross floor area 70sqm) It is noted that Planning permission was granted by the Planning Authority for the proposed development in 2006.

Planning reference Number 07573: to retain changes to front elevation to include new door, modification to window and signage. It is noted that Planning was withdrawn by the applicant in 2007.

4. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed development shall consist of:

- The change of use of the existing restaurant space and ground floor its refurbishment into an office suite with ancillary services such as toilets and tea stations.
- The existing offices and meeting space at first floor shall be renovated.
- The main infrastructural works associated with the proposal shall centre around the extension of the existing stair core and the installation of new personnel lift to comply with TGD M.
- In addition, the majority of non-load bearing walls at ground floor level shall be demolished and a new system of foul drainage installed to facilitate the new layouts.
- Other than works to support the above, there shall be no deep excavations involved in the development.

It is intended the property will provide facilities for a multi-purpose community and enterprise hub with public reception area, multi-use offices, meeting rooms and supporting spaces. The design incorporates using two existing entrances, one from Burkes Lane and one from North Gate Street. This will facilitate use of the property by a singular entity or multiple entities.

The cellular offices are designed to cater for multiple users, as demand necessitates and will provide opportunities for use by smaller / start up enterprises to have own door facilities. These offices vary in size and are sub-divided with lightweight partition systems thus offering a level of flexibility for companies to grow within the hub, conforming with best practice. This is in keeping with guidance regarding office size and use in town centres, a dearth of which has been identified as an issue in Athenry town centre.

The proposed layout of the building, which has been vacant for 12+ years, will allow multiple uses, connected to enterprise and employment in addition to providing spaces for community groups and meeting facilities. The proposed installation of a passenger lift will make the space more accessible for all users. This facility forms part of Galway County Councils response to delivering on key objectives of multiple strategies including Our Rural Future, the County Development Plan, the Local Economic & Community Plan and the policy of promoting remote working facilities in key towns, with Athenry identified in the County Development Plan as being strategically important.

The internal layout and renovation proposed for this Galway County Council property is aligned to addressing regenerative goals addressing vacancy in the Town Centre and delivering spaces capable of facilitating services and activities for community and economic sustainability. Through this renovation and refurbishment, it is proposed that the development will contribute to the overall footfall in the area and bolster both Burkes Lane and the North Gate street area.

5. PLANNING CONTEXT AND COMPLIANCE

The building was originally a dwelling house however, it has been vacant for over 12 years. Previously has been operating as a restaurant, offices and a place of worship. The development will consist of the renovation and refurbishment of the existing building which shall specifically consist of:

- internal demolition of the existing Ground and First Floor partitions;
- The excavation and installation of a new lift and pit;
- Replacement of existing External Windows and Doors;
- Renovation of rear single storey area;
- Relocation of existing toilets and welfare;
- New system of foul drainage installed utilising to existing connection to public sewer;
- Installation of a kitchenette at first floor level adjacent to the meeting room;
- Full Mechanical & Electrical Fitout.

This proposal is aligned to the Regional Planning Guidelines, Objectives of the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 and Athenry Local Area Plan 2012-2018 (as deferred).

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) places a similar emphasis on the revitalisation of urban and rural settlements as attractive and vibrant places to live and work with high quality services and facilities including integrated public transport.

The regeneration of towns and villages has been referenced in the RSES as a major priority action for the region as reflected in RPO 3.4 which supports regeneration and renewal. This focus includes the utilisation of existing buildings.

Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

Policy CGR 8 of the Development Plan is focused on Town and Village Centres as follows.

CGR 8 Town and Village Centre

To encourage and support a range of appropriate uses in town and village centres that will assist in the regeneration and reuse of vacant and under-utilised buildings and land and will re-energise the town and

This proposal aims to renovate and refurbish this property which is currently vacant and under-utilised into a multi-purpose community and enterprise facility.

Athenry Local Area Plan 2012-2018

In May 2027 the Council noted that pursuant to Section 19 (1) (d) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as inserted by Section 12 (a) (iii) of the Planning & Development (Amendment) Act 2010), the Council resolved to defer the sending of a notice under Section 20 (3) (a) (i) of the Act of 2000. The 2012-2018 LAP Plan therefore remains in force and is consistent with the Development Plan. A new LAP will be considered in 2023.

The subject site is currently zoned Town Centre/ Commercial (C1) with a general zoning objective: Objective LU1 – Town Centre/Commercial (C1) Promote the development of the Town Centre as an intensive, high quality, well-landscaped, human scaled and accessible environment with an appropriate mix of uses, including residential, commercial, service, tourism, enterprise, public and community uses as appropriate, that provide a range of retail services, facilities and amenities to the local community and visitors to the town. The town centre and associated main streets will remain the primary focus for retail and service activity in the town.”

As outlined in Section 4 (Proposed Development) above the proposed utilisation complies with this objective (LU1) and has been previously approved for the proposed usage as Office accommodation and place of congregation.

Furthermore, the proposal meets the vision of the current LAP contributing to ensuring a sustainable town approach in maintaining a strong, compact and vibrant town centre which sustains existing business while attracting new businesses in order to fulfil the retailing and service needs of the town and its surrounding hinterland, in addition to offering a pleasant and attractive environment for shopping, business, recreation, living and attracting visitors. This proposal also ensures that there

is a range of facilities, amenities and supporting services to serve a growing community, optimising the potential of Athenry.

6. BUILT HERITAGE

This vacant property is located on the corner of North Gate Street and Burkes Lane in the centre of Athenry. Burke's Lane in particular, reflects the medieval layout of Athenry which is central the character of the town. The prominence of the property at a junction and with its curved façade within the streetscape has been considered. The statement of significance for ACA included in the Athenry LAP 2012-2018 notes the principle significance of the town lies in its degree of survival as a medieval fortified town, embracing a number of fine monuments and archaeological remains. The street pattern, plot sizes, buildings and architectural coherence visibly emerge directly from this historic role. The majority of buildings span the late 19th Century and share many characteristics. Surviving traditional shop fronts are important features. In this regard, preliminary Pre-Planning Consultations have taken place with the Galway County Council Heritage Officer and Architectural Conservation Officers.

The impact of the proposed development on the built heritage of the Athenry ACA is therefore designed as minimal with no external alterations proposed other than the replacement of existing windows and doors to improve the BER rating of the property and the inclusion of a smoke vent to the roof over the stairwell. The Drawings attached as part of the Planning Pack reference the type of external doors and windows proposed which have been considered in the context of its location within the ACA.

An Archaeological Impact Assessment has been prepared by specialist consultant (Through Time Ltd) to assess the affects (if any) on the site and accompanies the Part 8 Planning Pack for review. The purpose of the assessment was to identify likely or significant effects on the cultural heritage (archaeology, architectural heritage and / or folklore and history) as a result of the proposed works and determine whether further investigations or other measures would be required to mitigate any likely adverse effects.



7. DENSITY

The development does not seek to increase the overall footprint of the developed area of the site and works within the confines of same and will not compromise other development in the area.

Given the central location of the property within the town, it is considered that the relatively high plot ratio is within the provisions of the development plan.

8. OVERLOOKING

The existing building has majority of the glazing/windows facing onto North Gate Street and Burkes lane with the minimal rear windows overlooking the Athenry Arts and Heritage Centre at St. Mary's which is a National Monument, and this is accounted for in the Archaeological Impact Assessment.

The proposed development will not increase the extent of overlooking and will not compromise other development in the area.

9. REFUSE STORAGE

Within the design it is intended to locate a Bin store on the Burkes lane elevation at the Eastern wall of the property at Ground floor. This store shall be accessible via a dedicated existing door to the lane.

10. CAR PARKING

Although this building has been vacant for a considerable period, previous uses from restaurant (ground floor) and place of worship (first floor) have relied on the ample availability of public car parking. Public car parking will continue to support this proposal for daytime office / co-work use and / or any evening time use of the meeting room. There is public parking adjacent to the facility including car parking which is currently available free of charge at the "Back Lawn" adjacent to Kenny Park. The town is well served by public transport options including rail and bus services and there is reasonably good mobility in the town which will be further enhanced by works being progressed by Galway County Council under the Regeneration Team and the Infrastructure & Operations Team.

Bicycle storage in addition to that already provided in the town is proposed for nearby Market Square as part of a future public realm enhancement proposals.

11. ECOLOGY

A Bat Survey Report has been prepared by Eire Ecology (Environmental Consultants) and accompanies the Part 8 planning pack. Given the low impact of the proposed works and the lack of evidence of bats on the site, it was the surveyors opinion that no effect on the local bat population will arise from the proposed development.

A survey for swifts will be undertaken on site between the recommended months of June and August and any mitigation measures if required, enacted. An initial review of the site by the Ecologist, indicates a low potential for the presence of swifts.

12. SUMMARY

This proposal sets out Galway County Council desire to seek Part 8 planning approval to carry out works at an existing two storey vacant building at the junction of Northgate Street & Burkes Lane, Athenry, Co. Galway. The vacant property, in the ownership of Galway County Council, is referred to locally as Somers House and occupies a prominent position in the streetscape within Athenry Architectural Conservation Area.

In this regard the proposal by Galway County Council for internal layout and renovation seeks to align fully to the goals of the ACA and to addressing regenerative goals by tackling vacancy in the Town Centre. The development proposed allows for multi-purpose use of the existing building and will deliver spaces capable of facilitating services and activities for community and economic sustainability. It is intended that the renovation and refurbishment proposal as outlined, will contribute to the community and enterprise facilities of the overall Town and contribute to bolstering both Burkes Lane and the North Gate Street areas.

The proposed usage of the building as offices and congregation / meeting space is consistent with previously approved Planning submissions for the site specifically the upstairs first floor space. The change of use of the ground floor area from restaurant to Community and Enterprise space is in accordance with Galway County Council Objectives (2022-2028) with its provision of commercial, enterprise, public and community uses.

The minimal intervention on the North Gate or Burke's lane elevation envisaged with the almost entirely internal fit out restricts any visual impact of the development to a change of windows and doors for BER requirements. This aligns with the primary objective of the ACA which is to enhance and protect the architectural heritage of the area.

Overall, the proposal is designed to meet objectives of the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 of the Athenry Local Area Plan and represents an appropriate and sustainable development of the site.